

IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE
EASTERN DISTRICT OF VIRGINIA

Alexandria Division

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

Case No. 1:24-mj-144

RUSSELL RICHARDSON VANE, IV,
a/k/a “Duke Russ Hampel,”
a/k/a “Duke,”

Defendant.

AFFIDAVIT IN SUPPORT OF A CRIMINAL COMPLAINT

I, Marc Gastaldo, being duly sworn, depose and state:

INTRODUCTION

1. This affidavit is submitted in support of a criminal complaint for RUSSELL RICHARDSON VANE, IV (“VANE”), a/k/a “Duke Russ Hampel,” a/k/a “Duke,” for attempting to develop, produce, stockpile, acquire, and possess a biological toxin for use as a weapon, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 175(a).

2. I am a Special Agent with the Federal Bureau of Investigation (“FBI”). I have been in this position since July 5, 2020. I am assigned to a squad in the Washington Field Office Joint Terrorism Task Force (“JTTF”) focused on domestic terrorism. In my duties as a Special Agent, I have gained training and experience in interviewing and interrogation techniques, arrest procedures, search warrant applications, the execution of searches and seizures, the exploitation of lawfully obtained evidence and data, and various other procedures. Currently, I am tasked with investigating criminal activity in and around Washington, D.C. and the surrounding northern

Virginia area. As a federal agent, I am authorized to investigate violations of laws of the United States, and as a law enforcement officer I am authorized to execute warrants issued under the authority of the United States. I am one of the investigators assigned to the ongoing investigation of VANE. Since I became involved in this investigation, I have reviewed public tips and publicly available photos and video, coordinated with multiple agencies, conducted interviews, and reviewed relevant documents, among other things.

3. The information set forth in this affidavit is based on my personal knowledge, that of other law enforcement agents, public records, and other sources as indicated herein. In addition, I have reviewed documents obtained during the investigation. Since this affidavit is being submitted for the limited purpose of securing the requested warrant, I have not included every fact known to me concerning this investigation. Rather, I have set forth only those facts relevant and necessary to establish probable cause.

APPLICABLE CRIMINAL LAW

4. Section 175(a) of Title 18, United States Code, makes it unlawful, in relevant part, to “knowingly develop[], produce[], stockpile[], transfer[], acquire[], retain[], or possess[] any biological agent, toxin,¹ or delivery system for use as a weapon [. . .] or attempt[], threaten[], or conspire[] to do the same.” Section 175(b) makes it a crime to “knowingly possess[] any biological

¹ “Toxin is defined as “the toxic material or product of plants, animals, microorganisms (including, but not limited to, bacteria, viruses, fungi, rickettsiae or protozoa), or infectious substances, or a recombinant or synthesized molecule, whatever their origin and method of production, and includes— (A) any poisonous substance or biological product that may be engineered as a result of biotechnology produced by a living organism; or (B) any poisonous isomer or biological product, homolog, or derivative of such a substance.” 18 U.S.C. § 178(2).

agent, toxin, or delivery system of a type or in a quantity that, under the circumstances, is not reasonably justified by a prophylactic, protective, bona fide research, or other peaceful purpose.”

PROBABLE CAUSE

5. RUSSELL RICHARDSON VANE, IV, is a 42-year-old male residing in a home on [REDACTED], Vienna, Virginia, [REDACTED]. On April 3, 2024, he filed a petition in Fairfax County Circuit Court to legally change his name to “Duke Russ Hampel.” The court has not yet granted his petition.

I. THE INITIAL TIP

6. On or about April 1, 2024, the FBI received multiple tips from both online sources and confidential human sources that a YouTube channel called “News2Share” posted a video titled “Virginia Kekoas militia ousts member they believe may have been entrapping them over explosives.” The video, posted at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmbd3vOXTrM>, carries the following description:

The Virginia Kekoas, a pro-gun prepper militia based in Eastern Virginia, and formerly affiliated with the Boogaloo movement, tells News2Share that they recently kicked out a member they believe may have been plotting an entrapment attempt against the group, or worse.

Russell Richardson Vane IV first made contact with the Virginia Kekoas in April 2022, according to the group’s leader . . . who goes by “ICE” and member . . . who goes by “Sasquatch.” Vane adopted the call sign “Duke.”

The pair provided extensive screenshots and documents showing that since joining, Vane – as “Duke” – engaged in an escalating sequence of unusual behavior that included apparent provocations for the group to develop homemade explosives.

“Sasquatch” and “ICE” spoke exclusively to News2Share to provide a thorough timeline of the events that led up to “Duke” being removed from their organization.

7. In the video, Kekoas militia members “ICE” and “Sasquatch” explain that VANE was formerly a member of the Virginia Kekoas militia, a militia prepper group, originally joining in April 2022.

II. BACKGROUND ON THE VIRGINIA KEKOAS MILITIA

8. According to open-source information posted by members of the Virginia Kekoas militia, they consider their group to be a “Constitutional militia and emergency preparedness group” whose goal is securing “all the rights for all the people all the time.” The group purports to advocate for practicing and training in survivalism techniques (including firearms tactics) and engage in activism in support of what they consider to be individual rights and against what they consider to be government overreach. The group claims to be apolitical and not involved in violent activity.

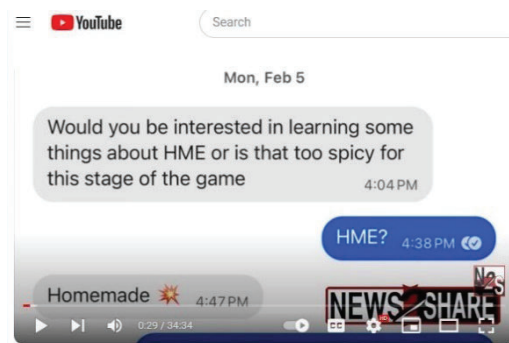
9. On or about January 15, 2024, the Kekoas members held a protest at the State Capitol in Richmond, Virginia, to oppose new gun control legislation, including limiting magazine capacity and banning guns at bars. At the protest, the militia members carried firearms and one individual wore an arm patch reading “Proud Militia Violent Extremist.”

III. VANE’S INTERACTIONS WITH THE KEKOAS MEMBERS

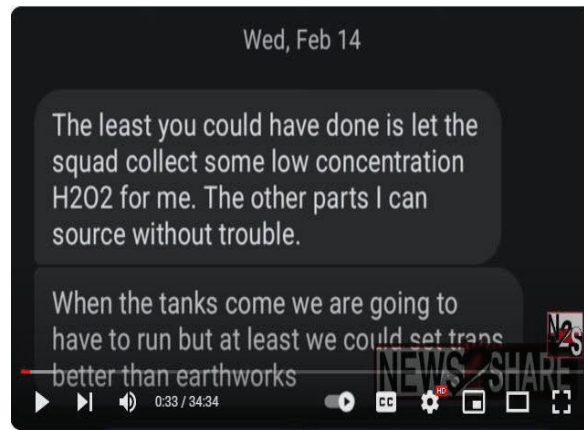
10. In the video posted by News2Share, Kekoas members ICE and Sasquatch describe a series of interactions with VANE, which led them to believe that VANE might have been a federal law enforcement official attempting to “entrap” members of the group. Among other unusual behavior, VANE claimed that he worked for the Intelligence Community and asked ICE whether the Kekoas leadership was interested in information on how to build homemade explosives. During another conversation, VANE handed Sasquatch a manila envelope containing unclassified documents from one government agency and maps of government facilities relating

to another government agency. The documents are shown on video, and government agency dissemination restrictions are visible under the classification level. These documents contained precursor reports for cellulose and nitrocellulose, discussed ways to obtain the precursors, and explained their applications in the creation of explosive material. Throughout his interactions with the Kekoas members, VANE made comments indicative of his interest in and knowledge of chemistry and the use of chemistry to manufacture dangerous substances.

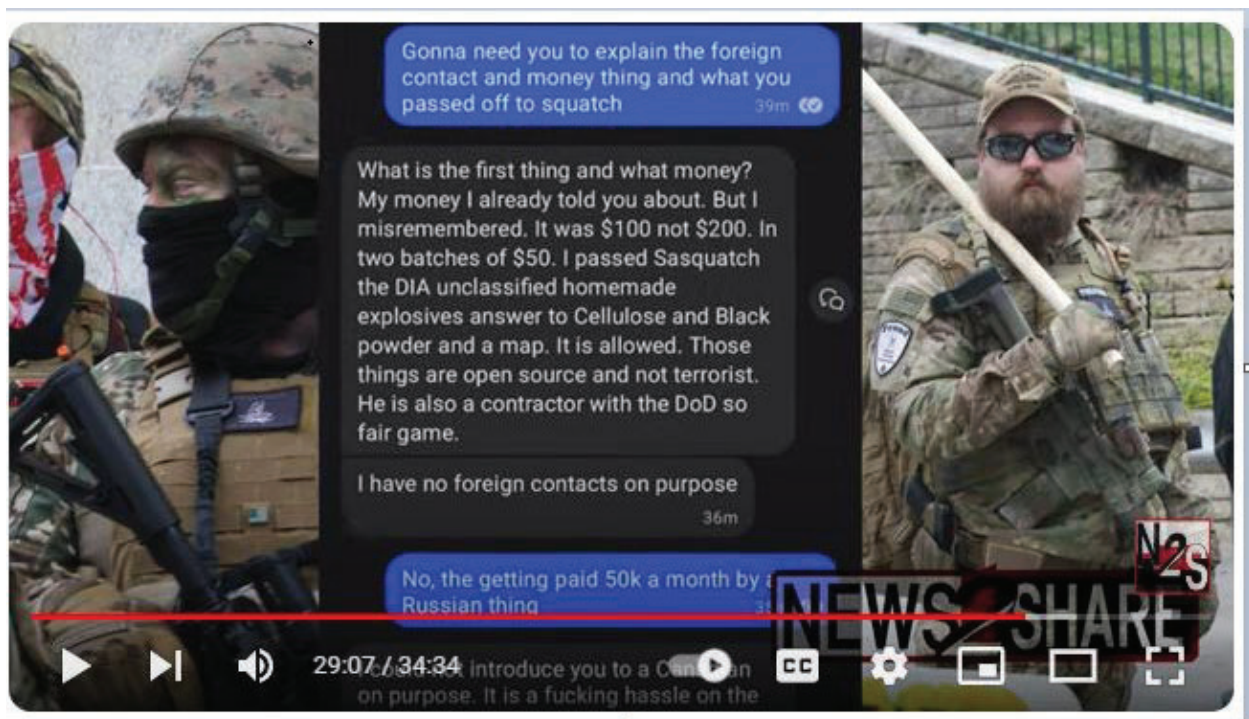
11. During the YouTube interview, ICE and Sasquatch show screenshots of encrypted chats in which VANE asks if the group is interested in information on how to produce homemade explosives.



12. The News2Share video also depicts chats between VANE, operating under the moniker “DUKE,” and a Kekoas member known as “PREACHER,” in which VANE mentions having asked members of the Kekoas militia to obtain hydrogen peroxide. In my training and experience, I know that hydrogen peroxide can be used as a precursor chemical to easily create homemade explosives. The chats also indicate that VANE believed the Kekoas ought to explore the use of explosives in order to set traps “when the tanks come.”



13. In another recorded chat, VANE admits to passing “the [] unclassified homemade explosives answer to Cellulose and Black powder and a map,” to Sasquatch.



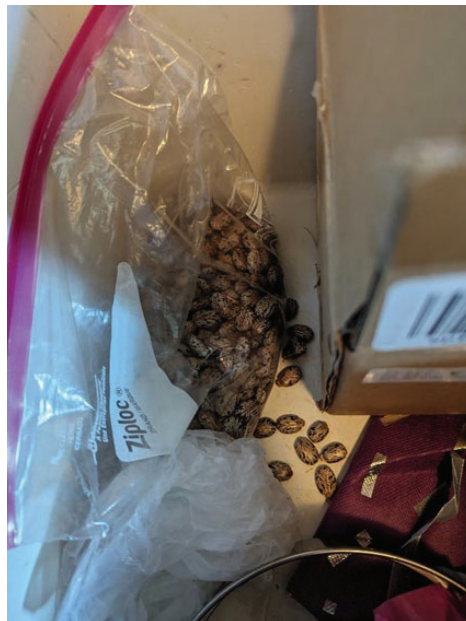
14. On April 3, 2024, ICE, Sasquatch, and a third member who used the moniker “Goose,” voluntarily met with Task Force Officers (“TFOs”) of the FBI, at which time they produced the documents provided to them by VANE.

15. In coordination with one government agency, the FBI ascertained that VANE had used his work computer to search for, access, and print physical copies of the exact documents

returned to the TFOs by ICE, Sasquatch, and Goose. VANE also used his work computer to search for, access, and print physical copies of other documents pertaining to explosive precursor compounds, including how to use them to manufacture explosive devices. Based on government records, these physical documents were accessed as early as February 12, 2024, and removed from a secure government facility. Based on statements made by the Kekoas members in the News2Share video, it appears that the documents were then transported by VANE in his personal vehicle to the location where he disseminated the documents to the militia on or about March 9, 2024.

IV. DISCOVERY OF SUSPECTED RICIN MANUFACTURING IN VANE'S HOME

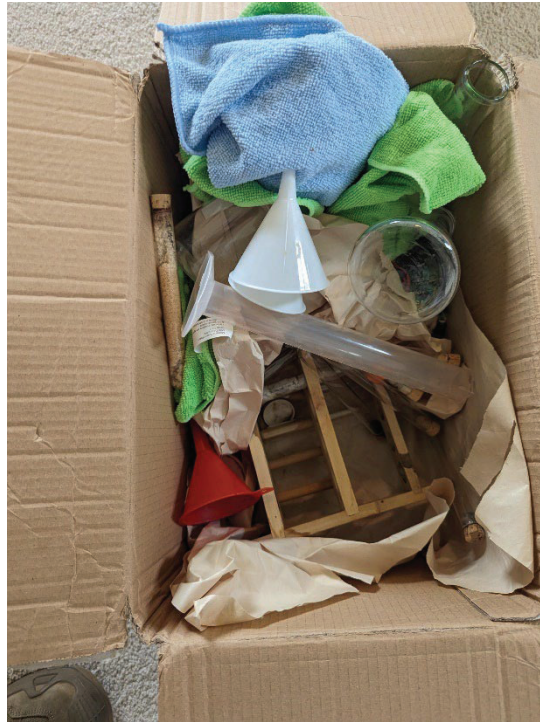
16. On April 10, 2024, the FBI executed a residential search warrant at VANE's home. During the execution of the warrant, FBI Special Agents searched a laundry room in VANE's residence. On a high shelf in that laundry room, the agents discovered a gallon-size Ziplock bag containing castor beans.



17. In a large cardboard box next to the castor beans, agents found a handwritten recipe for extracting ricin toxin from castor beans. In my training and experience, I know that ricin is a toxin, as that word is defined in 18 U.S.C. § 178, that is naturally present in castor beans. It is highly toxic, and can be fatal, if ingested, inhaled, or injected. Using certain chemicals and equipment, it is possible to isolate the ricin toxin from the castor beans, a process that I know can be accomplished in makeshift household laboratories. With the recipe, agents found a handwritten checklist that includes a what appears to be a “To-Do” list and what appears to be a shopping list of items to purchase. The shopping list includes “Tetracore Ricin Test Strips.”

18. Also in the cardboard box was a set of laboratory equipment, including beakers, a graduated cylinder, funnels, and a rack with test tubes, along with cleaning rags. There appeared to be powdery whitish material in some of the test tubes. According to FBI hazardous materials specialists, that material appears to be consistent with the byproducts of ricin production. In a second box on the same shelf, agents found a laboratory-style hotplate stirrer, a device which can be used both as a heating element and an automatic stirring device. I am informed that while heating is not a step in ricin production, stirring is. Near the castor beans were a set of fine mesh strainers. The handwritten ricin recipe specifically mentions straining solids as a step in the

manufacturing process. Also on the shelf, agents found a bottle of pH test strips. The handwritten ricin recipe specifically mentions pH testing as a step in the manufacturing process.



19. Also in the laundry room, and elsewhere in the residence, agents found other chemicals that can be used in the process of ricin production from castor beans.

20. During the evening of April 10, 2024, after searching VANE's residence for biological agents, toxins, and/or delivery systems, the FBI effected a probable cause arrest of VANE. VANE has been in the custody of law enforcement since April 10, 2024.

CONCLUSION

21. Based on the foregoing, I submit that there is probable cause to believe that on or about April 10, 2024, in Vienna, Virginia, within the Eastern District of Virginia, VANE attempted to develop, produce, stockpile, acquire, and possess a biological toxin for use as a weapon, in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 175(a).

Respectfully submitted,

/s/ Marc Gastaldo

Marc Gastaldo
Special Agent
Federal Bureau of Investigation

Submitted and attested to by the applicant in
accordance with the requirements of Fed. R.
Crim. P. 4.1 by telephone on April 11, 2024,

Lindsey R Vaala Digitally signed by Lindsey R Vaala
Date: 2024.04.11 13:31:48 -04'00'

Honorable Lindsey R. Vaala
United States Magistrate Judge